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ABSTRACT

More letters to the editor are being written to daily newspapers than ever before, and more of them are being published in ever-expanding letters columns. However, many letters go unpublished because of the letter's unsuitability, lack of space, or the writer's view having already been expressed. A study examined--by combining the methods of survey and content analysis--who the "unpublished" letter writers are, how they compare to the "published" writers, whether the same people are consistently getting their letters published and other people are consistently getting their letters rejected, and the editing process. The study looked at the letters received at a daily newspaper (circulation above 100,000) in a one-month period. The analysis consisted of 335 letters; 240 were "published" and 95 were "rejected." The survey consisted of a questionnaire to which 269 of the letter writers responded. Findings showed: (1) letters to the editors are written by a group of people above the norm in education, income, age, and community stability; (2) a majority believe that the open forum is not a good gauge of general opinion; (3) published writers were more likely than the unpublished ones to write letters opposing something in the newspaper; (4) published writers tended to write based on some expertise more than the unpublished letter writers; and (5) those whose letters were rejected tended to be more likely to submit a cathartic letter. (Ten tables of data and 29 notes are included.) (MS)

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The Open Forum: A Study of Letters to the Editor and the People Who Write Them

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The Open Forum: A Study of Letters to the Editor and the People Who Write Them

Introduction

More letters to the editor are being written to daily newspapers than ever before, and more of them are being published in ever-expanding letters columns. Ever since the 1930s, when letters columns in daily newspapers gained more widespread acceptance,[1] readers have been trying to add their say to their newspaper's editorial page. The flood of letters from readers has led to increased space for readers' contributions, but only so much space can be used for letters; as a result, editors began setting up ground rules, urging writers to keep letters short, establishing length limits and announcing on the editorial page that the newspaper reserves the right to edit letters for length.[2]

Despite these efforts, at many larger dailies, large percentages of letters from readers are rejected; some of these rejections are due to the letter's unsuitability (e.g. libelous, unsigned) while others are simply due to a lack of space or the fact that the writer's view has already been expressed. The New York Times prints less than 10 percent of the letters it receives.[3] While no current figures are available, a 1967 study estimated that about one letter to the editor in four nationwide is rejected;[4] most of the rejections are at larger metro dailies. At some smaller dailies, more than 90 percent of all letters received are published.[5] In the middle, The Des Moines Register prints about 6 in 10 letters.[6] One study found that 81 percent of the dailies in the United States publish at least 70 percent of the letters received.[7]

As a result, studies of letter writers to middle-sized and larger dailies have focused on those whose letters are published. Of course, part of this is due to the fact that most newspapers seek to protect the privacy interests of their "unpublished" letter writers by making neither their names nor letters available to researchers. As a result, little is known about those persons whose letters never see print. One study said the "unpublished" writers comprise the "broader but largely invisible cross section of Americans" who may be writing the "inarticulate, sometimes abusive letters screened from print."[8]

The purpose of this study is to find out who the "unpublished" letter writers are, how they compare to the "published" writers and indeed if the same people consistently are getting their letters published and another group is consistently getting its letters rejected. A second purpose is to examine the editing process by analyzing the letters.

Literature Review

Most Americans will never write a letter to the editor of a newspaper.[9] In fact, it appears that people in the Soviet Union may be more likely to write to the editor than their counterparts in the United States.[10]

While most research has suggested that people who write letters are above the norm in age, education, income and community stability,[11] some have found that the "key" to publication may lie in language skills[12] or what one author called training in "literate feedback."[13]

Politically, letter writers (at least those who are published) have tended to be conservatives.[14] When a political liberal writes

a letter, it tends to be more positive in tone, one study found.[15] Moderates are least likely to write.[16]

While public perceptions may be that letters are written by cranks, fanatics and extremists who have nothing better to do with their time, research has found that most writers are ordinary individuals who are inspired enough to take time to write their newspaper.[17]

Nonetheless, because those whose letters are published in newspapers are different from the general population, the letters column emerges as a poor gauge of general public opinion.[18] While a regular reader of the letters column may not know how the public feels on an issue, they might get a fair idea of which topics are on people's minds and of when shifts in popular opinion occur. For example, the letters editor at the Los Angeles Times said that the flow of mail indicated almost exactly when public sentiment shifted against President Nixon during Watergate.[19]

When writing a letter, most authors have both immediate and long-range goals. The immediate reason may be to react to something in the newspaper; the long-range goal is to have an effect on some other readers or on the newspaper itself. Today, most letters seem to scold the targeted newspaper for a lapse in its coverage.[20] Letters may be triggered by news stories, editorials, other letters or a desire to blow off steam.[21] Studies have suggested that some "published" writers think their letters are affecting events[22] or influencing the views of others.[23] And, indeed they might; letters to the editor are consistently one of the most popular items in a daily, especially noteworthy considering how little space they occupy.[24]

Readers have also rated high the reliability of letters' content.[25]

In determining who will become a "published" writer and who will be "unpublished," newspaper editors must often make unpopular decisions. Critics have charged some newspapers with not accurately portraying criticism in its letters column.[26] One study found that 99 percent of the newspapers polled publish letters critical of their reporting;[26] this may be due to a desire to placate critics by giving them their "day in court," and also perhaps because studies have shown that pessimistic, critical information sounds "more profound" than optimistic, upbeat communication.[28]

Method

This study combines the methods of survey and content analysis. The survey involved the mailing of a questionnaire to persons who wrote letters to the editor of a major daily newspaper, and whose letters either made it into print or did not. The content analysis examined the letters themselves.

The daily newspaper in this study requested confidentiality. It is a middle-sized newspaper with a circulation well above 100,000. Its editorial page staff, in cooperation with counsel, agreed to make available the unpublished letters (with names and other identifying characteristics deleted as well as the pre-edited versions of published letters); also, it conducted the mailings so that the researcher would not have access to the names of the writers of unpublished letters.

The editors advised that the newspaper receives between 400 and 600 letters per month for most of the year, with volume slightly higher during the winter legislative session and lower during the summer vacation periods. Following consultation with the editors, it was determined that a one-month sample of letters and letter writers would be examined.

During the sample month, the newspaper received 455 letters to the editor and published 263 (57.8 percent). The sample period began with the first mail delivery on the first day of the month and ended with the last mail delivery on the last day. The staff provided photocopies of each letter.

Of the 455 letters received, 120 had to be removed from the sample. The most common cause for this was multiple letter writers. If the same person had written several letters that month, and all were either rejected or all published, the writer would receive one questionnaire for that group. One writer fell into both the "published" and "unpublished" categories and was not sent a questionnaire. Other letters were removed because: they were anonymous, contained no return address, had an illegible name or address or, in the opinion of the editor, were not intended for publication by the writer.

That left 335 letters and letter writers for analysis. Of those, 240 (71.6 percent) were "published" and 95 (28.4 percent) were "rejected," although not for anonymity or illegibility.

Following two mailings, a total of 269 questionnaires were returned, representing a return rate of 83 percent; however, considering the character and makeup of the sample, perhaps the high return rate was not unexpected.

Results

Results: The Survey

Throughout the preparation of this study, one nagging question lingered. With a one-month sample of letter writers, would the study be able to adequately distinguish between people who are regularly "published" and those who are not? For example, one fear was that a person classified as "unpublished" for his/her one letter that month, may have had his/her last 20 letters published.

It was discovered, however, that the two groups for the sample month were notably composed of different people. Respondents were asked how many letters to the editor they had written in the previous three years and how many had been published. Those in the "published" group, as it turned out, were consistently more successful than their "unpublished" counterparts (see Table 1).

Table 1

Success in getting letters to the editor published:

Group	Letters Written	Letters Published	Success Rate
Published	6.2	5.0	80.6%
Unpublished	8.3	2.0	24.3%
Total	6.8	4.1	60.5%

There was no difference as to gender between the published and unpublished writers. Among the male writers, 56.8 percent were "published" and among females 55.4 percent were published writers.

Unpublished writers and published writers did not differ on age, although both groups combined to be older than the general population. For example, half of the unpublished writers were 50 or older, while fewer than one in five respondents in both groups were 29 or younger (see Table 2). (Chi square=2.9; df=4;NS).

Table 2

Age Groupings of Letter Writers

Group	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-49	60+
Published	17.1%	21.4%	17.6%	21.4%	22.5%
Unpublished	19.4	16.9	14.5	19.2	30.8
Total	17.7	20.0	16.6	20.8	24.9

The median age for the published writers was 46.0, compared to 49.5 for the unpublished writers.

Regarding education level, once again there was no difference between the published and unpublished groups. For example, among the published writers 46.2 percent had at least a bachelor's degree; that compares to 43.7 percent of the unpublished writers. In both groups, fewer than one person in ten had less than a high school degree. While about 33.4 percent of the adults in the state had at least started college, 74 percent of the letter writers had done so.

Regarding income, published writers were found to earn more money than their colleagues. In the $35,000 and above category, one finds 65.6 percent of the published sample and 44.6 percent of the unpublished. WHile both groups are well above the state's average income levels, the published writers led the way in the highest income category and the unpublished writers were more well-represented in the lower income categories (see Table 3). (Chi square-10.4; df-3; p less than .025).

Table 3

Income of Letter Writers

Group	Less than $15,000	$15,000-$24,999	$25,000-$34,999	$35,000+
Published	5.6%	10.2%	18.6%	65.5%
Unpublished	10.9	18.8	25.7	44.6
Total	7.2	12.7	20.7	59.4

The median income for the published group was $28,514; for the unpublished group it was $23,315.

Between published and unpublished writers, there were very few differences in their work situations. Pluralities in both categories are full-time wage earners; in the published group, the second most common response was "homemaker." Among the unpublished writers, it was "retired." (See Table 4)

Table 4

Writers' Employment Situations

Group	Full time Wage Earner	Full time; Owns Business	Part-time	Out of Work	Homemaker	Retired	Disabled	Student
Published	35.1%	16.5%	8.0%	5.9%	17.6%	12.4%	1.6%	3.2%
Unpublished	32.1	14.1	12.8	2.6	12.8	18.5	2.0	5.1
Total	34.2	15.8	9.4	4.9	17.3	13.0	1.7	3.8

Both groups of letter writers seemed remarkably stable in today's increasingly mobile society. Among the older, unpublished group, 53.8 percent had lived in the same community for 20 years or more; that compares to 38.3 percent of the published group.

Politically, both groups are almost evenly divided among Republicans, Democrats and independents. Pluralities for the groups were: published (35.9 percent Republicans); unpublished (34.2 percent Democrats).

Using a 4-point scale to measure political activity,[29] it was found that letter writers' political activity level is well-above the norm for the general population, but that published and unpublished writers do not differ. On the scale, measuring eight political activities, published writers had a mean score of 2.4 (out of 4) compared to 2.5 for the unpublished. (see Table 5).

It appears that letter writers are print media consumers; only 14.8 percent said they rely primarily on television for their news. That compares to upwards of 60 percent of the general population whose primary source of information and news is television. Among the published writers 73.8 percent listed newspapers as their main news source and 16 percent listed television; that compares to 69.5 and 11.6 percent respectively for the unpublished writers.

Table 5

Political Activity Scores of Letter Writers, Published and Unpublished (maximum possible activity score for each item is 4.0; minimum is 1.0)

Activity	Published	Unpublished	Total
Participation in political party between elections	2.1	2.3	2.2
Vote in elections	3.8	3.9	3.8
Send political leaders support messages	2.2	2.3	2.2
Send political leaders protest messages	2.1	2.3	2.2
Run for public office	1.2	1.3	1.2
Inform others about politics	2.5	2.5	2.5
Question regulations	2.4	2.5	2.4
Join, support political party	2.7	2.9	2.8
OVERALL SCORE	2.4	2.5	2.4

For all items, t value not significant

While most letter writers appear to also be letter readers, there were no differences between the two groups. In the published group, 61.1 percent said they read the letters column every day; 51.9 percent of the unpublished writers said the same. Both groups also have about 50 percent readership of editorials.

When they are not writing letters to newspapers, letter writers may be contacting their elected officials; 74 percent of the letter writers surveyed said they had written a letter to an elected official in the previous three years; in fact, the overall sample averaged 8.5 letters

to officials during that span of time. The unpublished group averaged 11.7 letters to officials, compared to 7.2 for the published group. Fully 23 percent of all letter writers surveyed said they had written 10 or more such letters in the past three years. Neither group is a regular contributor to radio call-in shows, with published writers averaging .52 calls for the previous three years and unpublished writers averaging 1.3 calls.

Respondents were asked why they had written their letters to the newspaper. While they were asked to respond to the letter they had written during the sample month, some respondents categorized as multiple writers checked several response categories. Nonetheless, several patterns emerge from their replies.

About 50 percent of the letters were written to respond to a news article, compared to 22 percent responding to an editorial and 13 percent replying to a previously published letter. Letters were more likely to be "against" than "in favor of" something. For example, while 8.9 percent of the letters supported positions taken in a previous editorial or letter, 26.1 percent were opposed. Published and unpublished writers were equally likely to write letters either to respond to a news article or to fulfill what they saw as a civic obligation. However, the groups differed somewhat in their other reasons. Published writers tended to be more likely to write to share expertise with the readers, while unpublished writers were more likely to submit a cathartic letter (see Table 6).

Table 6

Reasons for Writing Letters to Editor

Reason	Published	Unpublished	Total
Share expertise in a subject	30.5%	20.3%	27.5%
Was aware of event or situation	25.3	29.1	26.4
To correct an error	21.5	16.4	20.1
Blow off steam	18.9	30.4	22.3
To get name in print	.5	1.3	.7
Support editorial	5.8	7.6	6.3
Oppose editorial	16.8	12.7	15.6
Support letter	2.1	3.8	2.6
Oppose letter	11.1	10.1	10.8
Someone asked them to write	1.6	7.6	3.3
Reaction to a news story	48.9	49.4	49.1
Thank paper for publishing something	12.6	2.5	9.7
To promote agency, event, candidate	6.3	6.3	6.3
To fulfill a civic obligation	31.6	29.1	30.9

Note: Even writers of one letter were instructed to check all the applicable reasons; thus totals do not add to 100%

Neither group of letter writers felt that letters columns function as accurate gauges of public opinion. About 30 percent of the published group held that view while 21.6 percent of the unpublished writers agreed. In fact, older letter writers and those in the lower education categories were most likely to perceive the letters column as a good barometer of general public opinion. Perhaps most interestingly, more than one writer in three answered "don't know."

A majority of the respondents indicated that they would like to see more space devoted to the letters column at newspapers. This included both the published writers, whose letters perhaps were shortened (55.4 percent), and the unpublished writers, 69.6 percent of whom called for more space. And, respondents who perceived letters as an accurate gauge of general public opinion were more likely to favor more space for the letters column than those who did not. (See Table 7)

Table 7

Attitude Toward More Space for Letters,

by Perception of Column as Accurate Gauge

Group	Favor More Space	Oppose More Space	Don't Know
Letters are an accurate gauge	72.8%	12.9%	14.2%
Letters are not an accurate gauge	46.4	26.8	26.8

Chi square=9.51; df=2; p less than .02

Results:

Content Analysis of the Letters

Letters from readers take up a good amount of staff time, and at some larger dailies, several staffers are assigned full-time to the letters column. Typically, the letters editor has two basic functions: to decide which letters will be published and which will be rejected and which changes, if any, to make in those which are published. Some of those decisions are based on policy (length limits, number of letters a particular writer may have published per month, e.g.), while many are decided on a case-by-case basis.

For the sample of letters under study, rejections occurred on two levels: "first round" rejections were letters the editor would not consider at all for publication, that is to say, those which violate a newspaper policy, such as length, anonymity, libelous, no address included. Some newspapers, including the one under study, refuse to publish any letter where the writer requests his/her name be withheld from publication. Other "first round" discards include letters which contain fact errors, those which make what the newspaper deems an unfair personal attack or a situation where the writer cannot be reached for confirmation that he/she wrote the letter.

By contrast, "second round" rejections are not based on any policy or taste violation. These are letters which the editor feels add nothing to what has already been said in the letters column or those which merely add nothing to a topic of interest.

At the newspaper being studied, the most common reason for rejections--first or second round--was that the topic had already been

exhausted from every angle in previous letters. Also, letters which add no information, but simply express a writer's opinion for or against something are likely to meet the editor's blue pencil (see Table 8).

Table 8

Reasons for Letters Being Rejected

Reason	Percentage
Topic already exhausted	22.4%
From out of saturation area	16.7
Better letters available	12.0
No address included	8.8
Not on issue of public interest	7.8
Turned over to news staff for possible news story	7.3
Letter was anonymous	7.3
Had incorrect facts or unconfirmable facts	4.7
Form letter from lobbying group	4.1
Other (includes illegibility, point unclear, asked that name be withheld, writer could not be reached to confirm)	8.9

Other factors involved in the selection/rejection process may be whether a letter is handwritten or typed/word processed and the language quality contained in the letter. While neither typing nor grammatical excellence is part of a newspaper's requirement-for-publication policy, these factors might play a "sub-conscious" role.

An attempt to better gauge these factors was made by content analyzing the letters. All letters were studied in their original, pre-edited versions for language errors (grammar, spelling, punctuation), length (even though the newspaper studied does not have an announced length mimit for letters), and for whether the letter was handwritten.

The average length of the published letters was 206 words (in their original form) while the unpublished letters averaged 195 words. Following shortening by the editorial staff, the actual printed versions averaged 148 words.

Published letters in their original state averaged one language error per every 62 words, compared to one error for every 45 words in the unpublished group. In both groups, the most common error was punctuation. Many letters contained almost no punctuation, some contained too much, and others seemed to over-rely on semicolons or dashes.

The published letters' errors broke down as follows: 49 percent in punctuation, 12 percent in spelling, 39 percent in grammar and word usage or sentence structure. In the unpublished group, 39 percent of the errors were in punctuation, 25 percent of the errors were in spelling and 36 percent were in grammar, usage and sentence structure.

Among those letters eventually published, 60 percent were typed or word processed and 40 percent were handwritten; among the unpublished letters which were not subject to automatic rejection, 48 percent

were typed or word processed and 52 percent were handwritten.

The letters were edited substantially. While editors are very sensitive to changing a writer's prose, the fact remains that letters contain errors, often are too long and in some cases can have their phrasing noticeably improved. Mechanical changes included fixing up grammatical, spelling and other language errors. The newspaper studied does not adapt letters to Associated Press style. Substantive changes involved deleting content, altering misleading statements and occasionally adding an editor's note for clarification. Whenever the newspaper studied changes a writer's wording, it inserts brackets around the inserted language; when it deletes content, it inserts ellipses.

Overall, about 70 percent of the words in the to-be published letters ended up in print. Letters which were "negative" toward the newspaper averaged 196 words in original form and 153 words in print (78.1 percent); letters deemed "positive" averaged 114 words in their original, unedited versions and 88 words in print (77.2 percent). Letters neither praising the newspaper nor opposing it averaged 217 words in the original version and 160 words in print (73.7 percent).

Deleted material fell into seven categories:

1. References, where a specific outside source is quoted or referred to for information, such as "According to....." This group made up 8 percent of deletions.

2. Emotional, where the writer urged people to think or act a certain way, such as "I hope everyone reading this will..." This group made up 18 percent of deletions.

3. Accuse, in which a derogatory statement was made about someone, often a previous letter writer or columnist. One example was, "Mr. _____, who wrote a letter last Sunday, is an idiot."

Accuse accounted for 29 percent of deletions.

4. Flourish, where the writer made a verbose statement which did not add to the content. One example: "And, today, in this country, in our very troubled times..." This group accounted for 12 percent of all deletions.

5. Detail, where specific information was offered by the writer to support general information contained elsewhere in the letter. One example: in a letter about cruelty to animals, the writer listed 10 instances he had witnessed. Eight were deleted. This group accounted for 46 percent of all deletions.

6. Extra, in which the letter writer would tack on additional points to the main one in the letter. Example: in a letter criticizing the city's mayor, a writer sought to tack on information about other topics as well. Those additions were deleted in toto. About 37 percent of the deletions were form this group.

7. Miscellany, in which a word here or there is deleted to make a sentence either shorter or more readable. Example: in a letter about police behavior at a car accident scene, the editor deleted the words "the intersection of" from the clause "at the intersection of _____ and _____."

About 12 percent of deletions were from this group.

Because of the overlapping of categories, totals are well in excess in 100 percent, but relative weights are still useful gauges.

Finally, writers were asked for their reactions to the editing and rejection process. Generally, the published writers were pleased with the handling of their letters. About 84 percent said they were satisfied with how their letter was handled, while 15 percent were dissatisfied either with the way the letter was shortened, changed or given a particular headline. Some published writers seemed unhappy with where their letter was placed on the page. Of the 190 published writers, seven (3.7 percent) said they were totally dissatisfied with the handling of their letter. In open ended comments, these writers cried out that they had been censored, that the use of ellipses en masse changed their letters' impact or meaning. One said, "I'd have preferred the letter be printed in its entirety or not at all."

The most "dissatisfied" published writers were those who wrote in to oppose an editorial or correct an error in the newspaper. The most "satisfied" group comprised those who had written to support an editorial or to thank the newspaper for publishing something (see Table 9).

Table 9

Reactions of Published Writers to the Editing

Reaction	Percentage
Totally satisfied	62.4%
Satisfied	21.7
Dissatisfied	11.1
Totally dissatisfied	3.7

Meanwhile, unpublished writers' expressed some disappointment at their letter being rejected. While 37.2 percent said they were **really** not disappointed at the rejection, the rest expressed at least some level of disappointment. More than four in five in this group said they'd probably try again sometime, the same percentage for the "published" writers. The most disappointed "unpublished" writers were those who wrote to oppose an editorial; the least disappointed were those who had written either to support an editorial or because they had been asked by someone to write a letter.

Perhaps the reactions were relatively mind because the newspaper notifies "rejected" writers with an explanatory postcard. (see Table 10)

Table 10

Reactions of Unpublished

Writers to Rejection

Reaction	Percentage
Very disappointed	12.8%
Somewhat disappointed	25.6
Slightly disappointed	24.4
Not disappointed	37.2

Discussion

The letters to the editor column is not truly a voice of the people. It is inhabited instead by a group of people above the norm in education, income, age and community stability. But, that is not the fault of editors, for the letters which they reject are from the same types of people as the letters the print. Clearly, letter writers differ from non-writers a great deal more than published writers differ from the unpublished ones.

Both groups of letter writers are aware that they are not typical, as only 27.2 percent of them said they think the open forum is a good gauge of general opinion.

By a hair, the unpublished writers were more likely to favor more space in the letters column, perhaps hoping those extra column inches would clear a path for their letters.

Published writers were more likely than the unpublished ones to write letters opposing something in the newspaper. This supports the view of many editors to "bend over backward" to publish dissenting voices. It also confirms research suggesting negative communication seems more profound than positive remarks.

Since this is the first examination of unpublished letter writers, comparisons cannot be made. But, the unpublished group is certainly active politically, reasonably facile with the language and demographically quite similar to the published writers. More study is needed of this sub-group of letter writers.

Perhaps the most noteworthy difference between the published and unpublished writers was why they wrote the letter.

The published writers tended to write based on some expertise more than the unpublished letter writers; and, conversely, those whose letters were rejected tended to be more likely to submit a cathartic letter, which perhaps was too emotional or lacked the factual base editors look for in a letter. Interestingly, the most dissatisfied published writers and the most disappointed unpublished writers were those who had written to oppose a newspaper editorial.

Similar studies of letter writers--published and unpublished--need to be conducted over longer time spans in an effort to better understand who really writes letters to the editor, instead of just who gets letters published.

Notes

1. Until the 1930s, few newspapers had a regular letters-to-the-editor column. Perhaps the most significant event in the growth of the letters columns was a 1934 editorial in The New York Times which saluted the open forum as "a debating society which never adjourns in which everything knowledgeable is discovered." The editorial went on to praise letter writers as descendants of the "long winded Publicolas and Catos of our ancestors." See Daniel Greene, "Dear Mr. Editor, you fink: Masses of Letters Deluge Nation's Newspapers as Readers Speak Out." National Observer, May 4, 1970, p. 22.

2. Steve Pasternack and Suraj Kapoor, "The Letters Boom." The Masthead Fall 1980, pp. 23-25. Also, Ernest C. Hynds. Editorial Pages as Taking Stands, Providing Forums, Journalism Quarterly, 1976, Report From 53, 532-535.

3. David Shaw, "Readers Let Fly in Letters to the Editor," Los Angeles Times, Nov. 5, 1977, p. 1. Also, Clifton Daniel, "Right of Access to Mass Media--Government Obligation to Enforce the First Amendment," Texas Law Review, March 1970, 48, 783-790.

4. Ross E. Heller. "Extremist in Letters to the Editor, Northeast vs. Northwest." Unpublished M.S. thesis, University of Oregon, 1967.

5. Hynds, 1976, op. cit.

6. Interview with Bill Leonard, letters editor.

7. Ernest Hynds, "Editorial Pages are Taking Stands, Providing Forums," Journalism Quarterly, 1976, 53, 532-535.

8. David L. Grey and Trevor R. Brown, "Letters to the Editor: Hazy Reflections of Public Opinion," Journalism Quarterly, 1969, 47, 450-456.

9. See, for example, William D. Tarrant, "Who Writes Letters to the Editor?", Journalism Quarterly, 1957, 34, 501-502; also, for a more recent confirmation, see Ernest Hynds, American Newspapers in the 1980s, NY: Hastings House, 1980, and Pasternack & Kapoor, op. cit.

10. See Stephen White, "Political Communication in the USSR: Letters to Party, State and Press," Political Studies, 1983, 31, 43-60.

11. See Tarrant, op. cit.; also, Benjamin D. Singer, Feedback and Society, Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973.

12. Leila Sussman, "Mass Political Letter Writing in America," Public Opinion Quarterly, 1959, 23, 11-13.

13. Singer, op. cit.

14. Phillip E. Converse, Aage R. Clausen and Warren E. Miller, "Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election," American Political Science Review, 1965, 59, 321-323. Also, Robert S. Erikson and Norman R. Luttbeg, American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact. New York: John Wiley, 1973.

15. Jack B. Haskins, "People Who Write Letters," Editor & Publisher, 1967, no. 48, p. 38.

16. Ibid.

17. Gayle Waldrop, Editor and Editorial Writer, New York: William C. Brown, 1967.

18. Waldrop, op. cit.; Haskins, op. cit.; Erikson & Luttbeg, op. cit.

19. Shaw, op. cit.

20. See George Bain, "In Praise of Taking Pen in Hand," Macleans, March 25, 1985, p. 61. Bill Greenwell, Letters to the Editor, New Statesman, October 21, 1983, p. 33. Also, see Heller, op. cit. and Hal Davis and Galen Rarick, "Functions of Editorials and Letters to the Editor," Journalism Quarterly, 1964, 41, 108-109.

21. Davis & Rarick, op cit. Also, see Gerald S. Nagel, "Letters to the Editor: A Public Bid for Fame," Columbia Journalism Review, May/June 1974, pp. 47-48.

22. Gary L. Vacin, "A Study of Letter Writers," Journalism Quarterly, 1965, 42, 464-465.

23. Tarrant, op. cit. Also, see Adrian Furnham, "Popular Interest in Psychological Findings: The Times Correspondence Over the Burt Scandal," American Psychologist, August 1986, 41, 922-924.

24. A variety of readership studies have found letters to be among the most well read portions of a newspaper. See Leo Bogart, Press and Public, Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1981. In fact, letters are so popular that some newspapers reprint them in books.

25. Michael Singletary, "How Public Perceives Letters to the Editor," Journalism Quarterly, 1976, 53, 535-537.

26. News Critics Not Welcome, Accuracy in Media Report, number 6, 1977, p. 4.

27. Robert Achorn, "Letters to the Editor: Survey for Associated Press Managing Editors Professional Standards Committee, 1976.

28. Teresa Amabile. Brilliant but Cruel: Perceptions of Negative Evaluators. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1983, 19, 146-156.

29. See Lester Milbrath, "The Nature of Political Beliefs and the Relationship of the Individual to the Government," American Behaviorial Scientist, 1968, 12, 28-36. Using this scale, a score of 4 on any item indicated a very high level of activity, while a score of 1 indicated a low level of activity.